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THE SIEGE OF CORINTH.

PARISINA.

T. DAVISON, Lombard-street,
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THE

SIEGE OF CORINTH.

A POEM.

PARISINA.

A POEM.

THIRD EDITION.

LONDON:

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1816.

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THE

SIEGE OF CORINTH.

"Guns, Trumpets, Blunderbusses, Drums, and Thunder."

THE

SIEGE OF CORINTH.

TO

JOHN HOBHOUSE, ESQ.

THIS POEM IS INSCRIBED

BY HIS

FRIEND.

Jan. 22, 1816.

ADVERTISEMENT.

"THE grand army of the Turks (in 1715), under the
" Prime Vizier, to open to themselves a way into the
" heart of the Morea, and to form the siege of Napoli di
" Romania, the most considerable place in all that coun-
" try*, thought it best in the first place to attack Corinth,
" upon which they made several storms. The garrison
" being weakened, and the governor seeing it was impos-
" sible to hold out against so mighty a force, thought fit
" to beat a parley: but while they were treating about
" the articles, one of the magazines in the Turkish camp,
" wherein they had six hundred barrels of powder, blew

* Napoli di Romania is not now the most considerable place in the Morea, but Tripolitza, where the Pacha resides, and maintains his government. Napoli is near Argos. I visited all three in 1810-11; and in the course of journeying through the country from my first arrival in 1809, I crossed the Isthmus eight times in my way from Attica to the Morea, over the mountains, or in the other direction, when passing from the Gulf of Athens to that of Lepanto. Both the routes are picturesque and beautiful, though very different: that by sea has more sameness, but the voyage being always within sight of land, and often very near it, presents many attractive views of the islands Salamis, Ægina, Poro, &c. and the coast of the continent.

ADVERTISEMENT.

" up by accident, whereby six or seven hundred men
" were killed: which so enraged the infidels, that they
" would not grant any capitulation, but stormed the
" place with so much fury, that they took it, and put
" most of the garrison, with Signior Minotti, the gover-
" nor, to the sword. The rest, with Antonio Bembo,
" proveditor extraordinary, were made prisoners of war."

History of the Turks, vol. iii. p. 151.

THE

SIEGE OF CORINTH.

I.

MANY a vanished year and age,
And tempest's breath, and battle's rage,
Have swept o'er Corinth; yet she stands
A fortress formed to Freedom's hands.
The whirlwind's wrath, the earthquake's shock,
Have left untouched her hoary rock,
The keystone of a land, which still,
Though fall'n, looks proudly on that hill,
The land-mark to the double tide
That purpling rolls on either side,
As if their waters chafed to meet,
Yet pause and crouch beneath her feet.
But could the blood before her shed
Since first Timoleon's brother bled,

Or baffled Persia's despot fled,
Arise from out the earth which drank
The stream of slaughter as it sank,
That sanguine ocean would o'erflow
Her isthmus idly spread below:
Or could the bones of all the slain,
Who perished there, be piled again,
That rival pyramid would rise
More mountain-like, through those clear skies,
Than yon tower-capt Acropolis
Which seems the very clouds to kiss.

II.

On dun Cithæron's ridge appears
The gleam of twice ten thousand spears;
And downward to the Isthmian plain
From shore to shore of either main,
The tent is pitched, the crescent shines
Along the Moslem's leaguering lines;
And the dusk Spahi's bands advance
Beneath each bearded pasha's glance;
And far and wide as eye can reach
The turbaned cohorts throng the beach;

And there the Arab's camel kneels,
And there his steed the Tartar wheels;
The Turcoman hath left his herd[1],
The sabre round his loins to gird;
And there the volleying thunders pour,
Till waves grow smoother to the roar.
The trench is dug, the cannon's breath
Wings the far hissing globe of death;
Fast whirl the fragments from the wall,
Which crumbles with the ponderous ball;
And from that wall the foe replies,
O'er dusty plain and smoky skies,
With fires that answer fast and well
The summons of the Infidel.

III.

But near and nearest to the wall
Of those who wish and work its fall,
With deeper skill in war's black art
Than Othman's sons, and high of heart
As any chief that ever stood
Triumphant in the fields of blood;
From post to post, and deed to deed,
Fast spurring on his reeking steed,

Where sallying ranks the trench assail,
And make the foremost Moslem quail;
Or where the battery guarded well,
Remains as yet impregnable,
Alighting cheerly to inspire
The soldier slackening in his fire;
The first and freshest of the host
Which Stamboul's sultan there can boast,
To guide the follower o'er the field,
To point the tube, the lance to wield,
Or whirl around the bickering blade;—
Was Alp, the Adrian renegade!

IV.

From Venice—once a race of worth
His gentle sires—he drew his birth;
But late an exile from her shore,
Against his countrymen he bore
The arms they taught to bear; and now
The turban girt his shaven brow.
Through many a change had Corinth passed
With Greece to Venice' rule at last;
And here, before her walls, with those
To Greece and Venice equal foes,

He stood a foe, with all the zeal
Which young and fiery converts feel,
Within whose heated bosom throngs
The memory of a thousand wrongs.
To him had Venice ceased to be
Her ancient civic boast—" the Free;"
And in the palace of St. Mark
Unnamed accusers in the dark
Within the " Lion's mouth" had placed
A charge against him uneffaced:
He fled in time, and saved his life,
To waste his future years in strife,
That taught his land how great her loss
In him who triumphed o'er the Cross,
'Gainst which he reared the Crescent high,
And battled to avenge or die.

V.

Coumourgi[2]—he whose closing scene
Adorned the triumph of Eugene,
When on Carlowitz' bloody plain
The last and mightiest of the slain
He sank, regretting not to die,
But curst the Christian's victory—

Coumourgi—can his glory cease,
That latest conqueror of Greece,
Till Christian hands to Greece restore
The freedom Venice gave of yore?
A hundred years have rolled away
Since he refixed the Moslem's sway;
And now he led the Mussulman,
And gave the guidance of the van
To Alp, who well repaid the trust
By cities levelled with the dust;
And proved, by many a deed of death,
How firm his heart in novel faith.

VI.

The walls grew weak; and fast and hot
Against them poured the ceaseless shot,
With unabating fury sent
From battery to battlement;
And thunder-like the pealing din
Rose from each heated culverin;
And here and there some crackling dome
Was fired before the exploding bomb:
And as the fabric sank beneath
The shattering shell's volcanic breath,

In red and wreathing columns flashed
The flame, as loud the ruin crashed,
Or into countless meteors driven,
Its earth-stars melted into heaven;
Whose clouds that day grew doubly dun,
Impervious to the hidden sun,
With volumed smoke that slowly grew
To one wide sky of sulphurous hue.

VII.

But not for vengeance, long delayed,
Alone, did Alp, the renegade,
The Moslem warriors sternly teach
His skill to pierce the promised breach:
Within these walls a maid was pent
His hope would win, without consent
Of that inexorable sire,
Whose heart refused him in its ire,
When Alp, beneath his Christian name,
Her virgin hand aspired to claim.
In happier mood, and earlier time,
While unimpeached for traitorous crime,
Gayest in gondola or hall,
He glittered through the Carnival;

And tuned the softest serenade
That e'er on Adria's waters played
At midnight to Italian maid.

VIII.

And many deemed her heart was won;
For sought by numbers, given to none,
Had young Francesca's hand remained
Still by the church's bonds unchained:
And when the Adriatic bore
Lanciotto to the Paynim shore,
Her wonted smiles were seen to fail,
And pensive waxed the maid and pale;
More constant at confessional,
More rare at masque and festival;
Or seen at such, with downcast eyes,
Which conquered hearts they ceased to prize:
With listless look she seems to gaze;
With humbler care her form arrays;
Her voice less lively in the song;
Her step, though light, less fleet among
The pairs, on whom the Morning's glance
Breaks, yet unsated with the dance.

IX.

Sent by the state to guard the land,
(Which, wrested from the Moslem's hand,
While Sobieski tamed his pride
By Buda's wall and Danube's side,
The chiefs of Venice wrung away
From Patra to Eubœa's bay,)
Minotti held in Corinth's towers
The Doge's delegated powers,
While yet the pitying eye of Peace
Smiled o'er her long forgotten Greece:
And ere that faithless truce was broke
Which freed her from the unchristian yoke,
With him his gentle daughter came;
Nor there, since Menelaus' dame
Forsook her lord and land, to prove
What woes await on lawless love,
Had fairer form adorned the shore
Than she, the matchless stranger, bore.

X.

The wall is rent, the ruins yawn;
And, with to-morrow's earliest dawn,

O'er the disjointed mass shall vault
The foremost of the fierce assault.
The bands are ranked; the chosen van
Of Tartar and of Mussulman,
The full of hope, misnamed "forlorn,"
Who hold the thought of death in scorn,
And win their way with falchions' force,
Or pave the path with many a corse,
O'er which the following brave may rise,
Their stepping-stone—the last who dies!

XI.

'Tis midnight: on the mountain's brown
The cold, round moon shines deeply down;
Blue roll the waters, blue the sky
Spreads like an ocean hung on high,
Bespangled with those isles of light,
So wildly, spiritually bright;
Who ever gazed upon them shining,
And turned to earth without repining,
Nor wished for wings to flee away,
And mix with their eternal ray?
The waves on either shore lay there
Calm, clear, and azure as the air;

And scarce their foam the pebbles shook,
But murmured meekly as the brook.
The winds were pillowed on the waves;
The banners drooped along their staves,
And, as they fell around them furling,
Above them shone the crescent curling;
And that deep silence was unbroke,
Save where the watch his signal spoke,
Save where the steed neighed oft and shrill,
And echo answered from the hill,
And the wide hum of that wild host
Rustled like leaves from coast to coast,
As rose the Muezzin's voice in air
In midnight call to wonted prayer;
It rose, that chaunted mournful strain,
Like some lone spirit's o'er the plain:
'Twas musical, but sadly sweet,
Such as when winds and harp-strings meet,
And take a long unmeasured tone,
To mortal minstrelsy unknown.
It seemed to those within the wall
A cry prophetic of their fall:
It struck even the besieger's ear
With something ominous and drear,

An undefined and sudden thrill,
Which makes the heart a moment still,
Then beat with quicker pulse, ashamed
Of that strange sense it's silence framed;
Such as a sudden passing-bell
Wakes, though but for a stranger's knell.

XII.

The tent of Alp was on the shore;
The sound was hushed, the prayer was o'er;
The watch was set, the night-round made,
All mandates issued and obeyed:
'Tis but another anxious night,
His pains the morrow may requite
With all revenge and love can pay,
In guerdon for their long delay.
Few hours remain, and he hath need
Of rest, to nerve for many a deed
Of slaughter; but within his soul
The thoughts like troubled waters roll.
He stood alone among the host;
Not his the loud fanatic boast
To plant the crescent o'er the cross,
Or risk a life with little loss,

Secure in paradise to be
By Houris loved immortally:
Nor his, what burning patriots feel,
The stern exaltedness of zeal,
Profuse of blood, untired in toil,
When battling on the parent soil.
He stood alone—a renegade
Against the country he betrayed;
He stood alone amidst his band,
Without a trusted heart or hand:
They followed him, for he was brave,
And great the spoil he got and gave;
They crouched to him, for he had skill
To warp and wield the vulgar will:
But still his Christian origin
With them was little less than sin.
They envied even the faithless fame
He earned beneath a Moslem name;
Since he, their mightiest chief, had been
In youth a bitter Nazarene.
They did not know how pride can stoop,
When baffled feelings withering droop;
They did not know how hate can burn
In hearts once changed from soft to stern;

Nor all the false and fatal zeal
The convert of revenge can feel.
He ruled them—man may rule the worst,
By ever daring to be first:
So lions o'er the jackal sway;
The jackal points, he fells the prey,
Then on the vulgar yelling press,
To gorge the relics of success.

XIII.

His head grows fevered, and his pulse
The quick successive throbs convulse;
In vain from side to side he throws
His form, in courtship of repose;
Or if he dozed, a sound, a start
Awoke him with a sunken heart.
The turban on his hot brow pressed,
The mail weighed lead-like on his breast,
Though oft and long beneath its weight
Upon his eyes had slumber sate,
Without or couch or canopy,
Except a rougher field and sky
Than now might yield a warrior's bed,
Than now along the heaven was spread.

He could not rest, he could not stay
Within his tent to wait for day,
But walked him forth along the sand,
Where thousand sleepers strewed the strand.
What pillowed them? and why should he
More wakeful than the humblest be?
Since more their peril, worse their toil,
And yet they fearless dream of spoil;
While he alone, where thousands passed
A night of sleep, perchance their last,
In sickly vigil wandered on,
And envied all he gazed upon.

XIV.

He felt his soul become more light
Beneath the freshness of the night.
Cool was the silent sky, though calm,
And bathed his brow with airy balm:
Behind, the camp—before him lay,
In many a winding creek and bay,
Lepanto's gulf; and, on the brow
Of Delphi's hill, unshaken snow,
High and eternal, such as shone
Through thousand summers brightly gone,

Along the gulf, the mount, the clime;
It will not melt, like man, to time:
Tyrant and slave are swept away,
Less formed to wear before the ray;
But that white veil, the lightest, frailest,
Which on the mighty mount thou hailest,
While tower and tree are torn and rent,
Shines o'er its craggy battlement;
In form a peak, in height a cloud,
In texture like a hovering shroud,
Thus high by parting Freedom spread,
As from her fond abode she fled,
And lingered on the spot, where long
Her prophet spirit spake in song.
Oh, still her step at moments falters
O'er withered fields, and ruined altars,
And fain would wake, in souls too broken,
By pointing to each glorious token.
But vain her voice, till better days
Dawn in those yet remembered rays
Which shone upon the Persian flying,
And saw the Spartan smile in dying.

XV.

Not mindless of these mighty times
Was Alp, despite his flight and crimes;
And through this night, as on he wandered,
And o'er the past and present pondered,
And thought upon the glorious dead
Who there in better cause had bled,
He felt how faint and feebly dim
The fame that could accrue to him,
Who cheered the band, and waved the sword,
A traitor in a turbaned horde;
And led them to the lawless siege,
Whose best success were sacrilege.
Not so had those his fancy numbered,
The chiefs whose dust around him slumbered;
Their phalanx marshalled on the plain,
Whose bulwarks were not then in vain.
They fell devoted, but undying;
The very gale their names seemed sighing:
The waters murmured of their name;
The woods were peopled with their fame;
The silent pillar, lone and gray,
Claimed kindred with their sacred clay;

Their spirits wrapt the dusky mountain,
Their memory sparkled o'er the fountain;
The meanest rill, the mightiest river
Rolled mingling with their fame for ever.
Despite of every yoke she bears,
That land is glory's still and theirs!
'Tis still a watch-word to the earth.
When man would do a deed of worth,
He points to Greece, and turns to tread,
So sanctioned, on the tyrant's head:
He looks to her, and rushes on
Where life is lost, or freedom won.

XVI.

Still by the shore Alp mutely mused,
And wooed the freshness Night diffused.
There shrinks no ebb in that tideless sea[3],
Which changeless rolls eternally;
So that wildest of waves, in their angriest mood,
Scarce break on the bounds of the land for a rood;
And the powerless moon beholds them flow,
Heedless if she come or go:
Calm or high, in main or bay,
On their course she hath no sway.

The rock unworn its base doth bare,
And looks o'er the surf, but it comes not there;
And the fringe of the foam may be seen below,
On the line that it left long ages ago:
A smooth short space of yellow sand
Between it and the greener land.

He wandered on, along the beach,
Till within the range of a carbine's reach
Of the leaguered wall; but they saw him not,
Or how could he 'scape from the hostile shot?
Did traitors lurk in the Christians' hold?
Were their hands grown stiff, or their hearts waxed cold?
I know not, in sooth; but from yonder wall
There flashed no fire, and there hissed no ball,
Though he stood beneath the bastion's frown,
That flanked the sea-ward gate of the town;
Though he heard the sound, and could almost tell
The sullen words of the sentinel,
As his measured step on the stone below
Clanked, as he paced it to and fro;
And he saw the lean dogs beneath the wall
Hold o'er the dead their carnival,

Gorging and growling o'er carcase and limb;
They were too busy to bark at him!
From a Tartar's skull they had stripped the flesh,
As ye peel the fig when its fruit is fresh;
And their white tusks crunched o'er the whiter skull[4],
As it slipped through their jaws, when their edge grew dull,
As they lazily mumbled the bones of the dead,
When they scarce could rise from the spot where they fed;
So well had they broken a lingering fast
With those who had fallen for that night's repast.
And Alp knew, by the turbans that rolled on the sand,
The foremost of these were the best of his band:
Crimson and green were the shawls of their wear,
And each scalp had a single long tuft of hair[5],
All the rest was shaven and bare.
The scalps were in the wild dog's maw,
The hair was tangled round his jaw.
But close by the shore, on the edge of the gulf,
There sat a vulture flapping a wolf,
Who had stolen from the hills, but kept away,
Scared by the dogs, from the human prey;

But he seized on his share of a steed that lay,
Picked by the birds, on the sands of the bay.

XVII.

Alp turned him from the sickening sight:
Never had shaken his nerves in fight;
But he better could brook to behold the dying,
Deep in the tide of their warm blood lying,
Scorched with the death-thirst, and writhing in vain,
Than the perishing dead who are past all pain.
There is something of pride in the perilous hour,
Whate'er be the shape in which death may lower;
For Fame is there to say who bleeds,
And Honour's eye on daring deeds!
But when all is past, it is humbling to tread
O'er the weltering field of the tombless dead,
And see worms of the earth, and fowls of the air,
Beasts of the forest, all gathering there;
All regarding man as their prey,
All rejoicing in his decay.

XVIII.

There is a temple in ruin stands,
Fashioned by long forgotten hands;

Two or three columns, and many a stone,
Marble and granite, with grass o'ergrown!
Out upon Time! it will leave no more
Of the things to come than the things before!
Out upon Time! who for ever will leave
But enough of the past for the future to grieve
O'er that which hath been, and o'er that which must be:
What we have seen, our sons shall see;
Remnants of things that have passed away,
Fragments of stone, reared by creatures of clay!

XIX.

He sate him down at a pillar's base,
And passed his hand athwart his face;
Like one in dreary musing mood,
Declining was his attitude;
His head was drooping on his breast,
Fevered, throbbing, and opprest;
And o'er his brow, so downward bent,
Oft his beating fingers went,
Hurriedly, as you may see
Your own run over the ivory key,
Ere the measured tone is taken
By the chords you would awaken.

There he sate all heavily,
As he heard the night-wind sigh.
Was it the wind, through some hollow stone[6],
Sent that soft and tender moan?
He lifted his head, and he looked on the sea,
But it was unrippled as glass may be;
He looked on the long grass—it waved not a blade;
How was that gentle sound conveyed?
He looked to the banners—each flag lay still,
So did the leaves on Cithæron's hill,
And he felt not a breath come over his cheek;
What did that sudden sound bespeak?
He turned to the left—is he sure of sight?
There sate a lady, youthful and bright!

XX.

He started up with more of fear
Than if an armed foe were near.
"God of my fathers! what is here?
"Who art thou, and wherefore sent
"So near a hostile armament?"
His trembling hands refused to sign
The cross he deemed no more divine:

He had resumed it in that hour,
But conscience wrung away the power.
He gazed, he saw: he knew the face
Of beauty, and the form of grace;
It was Francesca by his side,
The maid who might have been his bride!

The rose was yet upon her cheek,
But mellowed with a tenderer streak:
Where was the play of her soft lips fled?
Gone was the smile that enlivened their red.
The ocean's calm within their view,
Beside her eye had less of blue;
But like that cold wave it stood still,
And its glance, though clear, was chill.
Around her form a thin robe twining,
Nought concealed her bosom shining;
Through the parting of her hair,
Floating darkly downward there,
Her rounded arm showed white and bare:
And ere yet she made reply,
Once she raised her hand on high;
It was so wan, and transparent of hue,
You might have seen the moon shine through.

XXI.

" I come from my rest to him I love best,
" That I may be happy, and he may be blest.
" I have passed the guards, the gate, the wall;
" Sought thee in safety through foes and all.
" 'Tis said the lion will turn and flee
" From a maid in the pride of her purity;
" And the Power on high, that can shield the good
" Thus from the tyrant of the wood,
" Hath extended its mercy to guard me as well
" From the hands of the leaguering infidel.
" I come—and if I come in vain,
" Never, oh never, we meet again!
" Thou hast done a fearful deed
" In falling away from thy father's creed:
" But dash that turban to earth, and sign
" The sign of the cross, and for ever be mine;
" Wring the black drop from thy heart,
" And to-morrow unites us no more to part."

" And where should our bridal couch be spread?
" In the 'midst of the dying and the dead?

" For to-morrow we give to the slaughter and flame
" The sons and the shrines of the Christian name.
" None, save thou and thine, I've sworn
" Shall be left upon the morn:
" But thee will I bear to a lovely spot,
" Where our hands shall be joined, and our sorrow forgot.
" There thou yet shalt be my bride,
" When once again I've quelled the pride
" Of Venice; and her hated race
" Have felt the arm they would debase
" Scourge, with a whip of scorpions, those
" Whom vice and envy made my foes."

Upon his hand she laid her own—
Light was the touch, but it thrilled to the bone,
And shot a chillness to his heart,
Which fixed him beyond the power to start.
Though slight was that grasp so mortal cold,
He could not loose him from its hold;
But never did clasp of one so dear
Strike on the pulse with such feeling of fear,
As those thin fingers, long and white,
Froze through his blood by their touch that night.

The feverish glow of his brow was gone,
And his heart sank so still that it felt like stone,
As he looked on the face, and beheld its hue
So deeply changed from what he knew:
Fair but faint—without the ray
Of mind, that made each feature play
Like sparkling waves on a sunny day;
And her motionless lips lay still as death,
And her words came forth without her breath,
And there rose not a heave o'er her bosom's swell,
And there seemed not a pulse in her veins to dwell.
Though her eye shone out, yet the lids were fixed,
And the glance that it gave was wild and unmixed
With aught of change, as the eyes may seem
Of the restless who walk in a troubled dream;
Like the figures on arras, that gloomily glare
Stirred by the breath of the wintry air,
So seen by the dying lamp's fitful light,
Lifeless, but life-like, and awful to sight;
As they seem, through the dimness, about to come down
From the shadowy wall where their images frown;

Fearfully flitting to and fro,
As the gusts on the tapestry come and go.

" If not for love of me be given
" Thus much, then, for the love of heaven,—
" Again I say—that turban tear
" From off thy faithless brow, and swear
" Thine injured country's sons to spare,
" Or thou art lost; and never shalt see
" Not earth—that's past—but heaven or me.
" If this thou dost accord, albeit
" A heavy doom 'tis thine to meet,
" That doom shall half absolve thy sin,
" And mercy's gate may receive thee within:
" But pause one moment more, and take
" The curse of him thou didst forsake;
" And look once more to heaven, and see
" Its love for ever shut from thee.
" There is a light cloud by the moon—[7]
" 'Tis passing, and will pass full soon—
" If, by the time its vapoury sail
" Hath ceased her shaded orb to veil,
" Thy heart within thee is not changed,
" Then God and man are both avenged;

" Dark will thy doom be, darker still
" Thine immortality of ill."

Alp looked to heaven, and saw on high
The sign she spake of in the sky;
But his heart was swollen, and turned aside,
By deep interminable pride.
This first false passion of his breast
Rolled like a torrent o'er the rest.
He sue for mercy! *He* dismayed
By wild words of a timid maid!
He, wronged by Venice, vow to save
Her sons, devoted to the grave!
No—though that cloud were thunder's worst,
And charged to crush him—let it burst!
He looked upon it earnestly,
Without an accent of reply;
He watched it passing; it is flown:
Full on his eye the clear moon shone,
And thus he spake—" Whate'er my fate,
" I am no changeling—'tis too late:
" The reed in storms may bow and quiver,
" Then rise again; the tree must shiver.

" What Venice made me, I must be,
" Her foe in all, save love to thee:
" But thou art safe: oh, fly with me!"
He turned, but she is gone!
Nothing is there but the column stone.
Hath she sunk in the earth, or melted in air?
He saw not, he knew not; but nothing is there.

XXII.

The night is past, and shines the sun
As if that morn were a jocund one.
Lightly and brightly breaks away
The Morning from her mantle grey,
And the Noon will look on a sultry day.
Hark to the trump, and the drum,
And the mournful sound of the barbarous horn,
And the flap of the banners, that flit as they're borne,
And the neigh of the steed, and the multitude's hum,
And the clash, and the shout, ' they come, they come!'
The horsetails[8] are plucked from the ground, and the sword
From its sheath; and they form, and but wait for the word.

Tartar, and Spahi, and Turcoman,
Strike your tents, and throng to the van;
Mount ye, spur ye, skirr the plain,
That the fugitive may flee in vain,
When he breaks from the town; and none escape,
Aged or young, in the Christian shape;
While your fellows on foot, in a fiery mass,
Bloodstain the breach through which they pass.
The steeds are all bridled, and snort to the rein;
Curved is each neck, and flowing each mane;
White is the foam of their champ on the bit:
The spears are uplifted; the matches are lit;
The cannon are pointed, and ready to roar,
And crush the wall they have crumbled before:
Forms in his phalanx each Janizar;
Alp at their head; his right arm is bare,
So is the blade of his scimitar;
The khan and the pachas are all at their post;
The vizier himself at the head of the host.
When the culverin's signal is fired, then on;
Leave not in Corinth a living one—
A priest at her altars, a chief in her halls,
A hearth in her mansions, a stone on her walls.

God and the prophet—Alla Hu!
Up to the skies with that wild halloo!
" There the breach lies for passage, the ladder to scale;
" And your hands on your sabres, and how should ye fail?
" He who first downs with the red cross may crave
" His heart's dearest wish; let him ask it, and have!"
Thus uttered Coumourgi, the dauntless vizier;
The reply was the brandish of sabre and spear,
And the shout of fierce thousands in joyous ire:—
Silence—hark to the signal—fire!

XXIII.

As the wolves, that headlong go
On the stately buffalo,
Though with fiery eyes, and angry roar,
And hoofs that stamp, and horns that gore,
He tramples on earth, or tosses on high
The foremost, who rush on his strength but to die:
Thus against the wall they went,
Thus the first were backward bent;
Many a bosom, sheathed in brass,
Strewed the earth like broken glass,

Shivered by the shot, that tore
The ground whereon they moved no more:
Even as they fell, in files they lay,
Like the mower's grass at the close of day,
When his work is done on the levelled plain;
Such was the fall of the foremost slain.

XXIV.

As the spring-tides, with heavy plash,
From the cliffs invading dash
Huge fragments, sapped by the ceaseless flow,
Till white and thundering down they go,
Like the avalanche's snow
On the Alpine vales below;
Thus at length, outbreathed and worn,
Corinth's sons were downward borne
By the long and oft renewed
Charge of the Moslem multitude.
In firmness they stood, and in masses they fell,
Heaped, by the host of the infidel,
Hand to hand, and foot to foot:
Nothing there, save death, was mute;
Stroke, and thrust, and flash, and cry
For quarter, or for victory

Mingle there with the volleying thunder,
Which makes the distant cities wonder
How the sounding battle goes,
If with them, or for their foes;
If they must mourn, or may rejoice
In that annihilating voice,
Which pierces the deep hills through and through
With an echo dread and new:
You might have heard it, on that day,
O'er Salamis and Megara;
(We have heard the hearers say,)
Even unto Piræus bay.

XXV.

From the point of encountering blades to the hilt,
Sabres and swords with blood were gilt:
But the rampart is won, and the spoil begun,
And all but the after carnage done.
Shriller shrieks now mingling come
From within the plundered dome:
Hark to the haste of flying feet,
That splash in the blood of the slippery street;
But here and there, where 'vantage ground
Against the foe may still be found,

Desperate groups, of twelve or ten,
Make a pause, and turn again—
With bandied backs against the wall,
Fiercely stand, or fighting fall.

There stood an old man—his hairs were white,
But his veteran arm was full of might:
So gallantly bore he the brunt of the fray,
The dead before him, on that day,
In a semicircle lay;
Still he combated unwounded,
Though retreating, unsurrounded.
Many a scar of former fight
Lurked beneath his corslet bright;
But of every wound his body bore,
Each and all had been ta'en before:
Though aged he was, so iron of limb,
Few of our youth could cope with him;
And the foes, whom he singly kept at bay,
Outnumbered his thin hairs of silver gray.
From right to left his sabre swept:
Many an Othman mother wept
Sons that were unborn, when dipped

His weapon first in Moslem gore,
Ere his years could count a score.
Of all he might have been the sire
Who fell that day beneath his ire:
For, sonless left long years ago,
His wrath made many a childless foe;
And since the day, when in the strait[9]
His only boy had met his fate,
His parent's iron hand did doom
More than a human hecatomb.
If shades by carnage be appeased,
Patroclus' spirit less was pleased
Than his, Minotti's son, who died
Where Asia's bounds and ours divide.
Buried he lay, where thousands before
For thousands of years were inhumed on the shore:
What of them is left, to tell
Where they lie, and how they fell?
Not a stone on their turf, nor a bone in their graves;
But they live in the verse that immortally saves.

XXVI.

Hark to the Allah shout! a band
Of the Mussúlman bravest and best is at hand:

Their leader's nervous arm is bare,
Swifter to smite, and never to spare—
Unclothed to the shoulder it waves them on;
Thus in the fight is he ever known:
Others a gaudier garb may show,
To tempt the spoil of the greedy foe;
Many a hand's on a richer hilt,
But none on a steel more ruddily gilt;
Many a loftier turban may wear,—
Alp is but known by the white arm bare;
Look through the thick of the fight, 'tis there!
There is not a standard on that shore
So well advanced the ranks before;
There is not a banner in Moslem war
Will lure the Delhis half so far;
It glances like a falling star!
Where'er that mighty arm is seen,
The bravest be, or late have been;
There the craven cries for quarter
Vainly to the vengeful Tartar;
Or the hero, silent lying,
Scorns to yield a groan in dying;
Mustering his last feeble blow
'Gainst the nearest levelled foe,

Though faint beneath the mutual wound,
Grappling on the gory ground.

XXVII.

Still the old man stood erect,
And Alp's career a moment checked.
"Yield thee, Minotti; quarter take,
"For thine own, thy daughter's sake."

"Never, renegado, never!
"Though the life of thy gift would last for ever."

"Francesca!—Oh my promised bride!
"Must she too perish by thy pride?"

"She is safe."—"Where? where?"—"In heaven;
"From whence thy traitor soul is driven—
"Far from thee, and undefiled."
Grimly then Minotti smiled,
As he saw Alp staggering bow
Before his words, as with a blow.
"Oh God! when died she?"—"Yesternight—
"Nor weep I for her spirit's flight:

" None of my pure race shall be
" Slaves to Mahomet and thee—
" Come on!"—That challenge is in vain—
Alp's already with the slain!
While Minotti's words were wreaking
More revenge in bitter speaking
Than his falchion's point had found,
Had the time allowed to wound,
From within the neighbouring porch
Of a long defended church,
Where the last and desperate few
Would the failing fight renew,
The sharp shot dashed Alp to the ground;
Ere an eye could view the wound
That crashed through the brain of the infidel,
Round he spun, and down he fell;
A flash like fire within his eyes
Blazed, as he bent no more to rise,
And then eternal darkness sunk
Through all the palpitating trunk;
Nought of life left, save a quivering
Where his limbs were slightly shivering:
They turned him on his back; his breast
And brow were stained with gore and dust,

And through his lips the life-blood oozed,
From its deep veins lately loosed;
But in his pulse there was no throb,
Nor on his lips one dying sob;
Sigh, nor word, nor struggling breath
Heralded his way to death:
Ere his very thought could pray,
Unanealed he passed away,
Without a hope from mercy's aid,—
To the last a renegade.

XXVIII.

Fearfully the yell arose
Of his followers, and his foes;
These in joy, in fury those:
Then again in conflict mixing,
Clashing swords, and spears transfixing,
Interchanged the blow and thrust,
Hurling warriors in the dust.
Street by street, and foot by foot,
Still Minotti dares dispute
The latest portion of the land
Left beneath his high command;

With him, aiding heart and hand,
The remnant of his gallant band.
Still the church is tenable,
Whence issued late the fated ball
That half avenged the city's fall,
When Alp, her fierce assailant, fell:
Thither bending sternly back,
They leave before a bloody track;
And, with their faces to the foe,
Dealing wounds with every blow,
The chief, and his retreating train,
Join to those within the fane:
There they yet may breathe awhile,
Sheltered by the massy pile.

XXIX.

Brief breathing-time! the turbaned host,
With added ranks and raging boast,
Press onwards with such strength and heat,
Their numbers balk their own retreat;
For narrow the way that led to the spot
Where still the Christians yielded not;
And the foremost, if fearful, may vainly try
Through the massy column to turn and fly;
They perforce must do or die.

They die; but ere their eyes could close
Avengers o'er their bodies rose;
Fresh and furious, fast they fill
The ranks unthinned, though slaughtered still;
And faint the weary Christians wax
Before the still renewed attacks:
And now the Othmans gain the gate;
Still resists its iron weight,
And still, all deadly aimed and hot,
From every crevice comes the shot;
From every shattered window pour
The volleys of the sulphurous shower:
But the portal wavering grows and weak—
The iron yields, the hinges creak—
It bends—it falls—and all is o'er;
Lost Corinth may resist no more!

XXX.

Darkly, sternly, and all alone,
Minotti stood o'er the altar stone:
Madonna's face upon him shone,
Painted in heavenly hues above,
With eyes of light and looks of love;

And placed upon that holy shrine
To fix our thoughts on things divine,
When pictured there, we kneeling see
Her, and the boy-God on her knee,
Smiling sweetly on each prayer
To heaven, as if to waft it there.
Still she smiled; even now she smiles,
Though slaughter streams along her aisles:
Minotti lifted his aged eye,
And made the sign of a cross with a sigh,
Then seized a torch which blazed thereby;
And still he stood, while, with steel and flame,
Inward and onward the Mussulman came.

XXXI.

The vaults beneath the mosaic stone
Contained the dead of ages gone;
Their names were on the graven floor,
But now illegible with gore;
The carved crests, and curious hues
The varied marble's veins diffuse,
Were smeared, and slippery—stained, and strown
With broken swords, and helms o'erthrown:

There were dead above, and the dead below
Lay cold in many a coffined row;
You might see them piled in sable state,
By a pale light through a gloomy grate;
But War had entered their dark caves,
And stored along the vaulted graves
Her sulphurous treasures, thickly spread
In masses by the fleshless dead:
Here, throughout the siege, had been
The Christians' chiefest magazine;
To these a late formed train now led,
Minotti's last and stern resource
Against the foe's o'erwhelming force.

XXXII.

The foe came on, and few remain
To strive, and those must strive in vain:
For lack of further lives, to slake
The thirst of vengeance now awake,
With barbarous blows they gash the dead,
And lop the already lifeless head,
And fell the statues from their niche,
And spoil the shrines of offerings rich,

And from each other's rude hands wrest
The silver vessels saints had blessed.
To the high altar on they go;
Oh, but it made a glorious show!
On its table still behold
The cup of consecrated gold;
Massy and deep, a glittering prize,
Brightly it sparkles to plunderers' eyes:
That morn it held the holy wine,
Converted by Christ to his blood so divine,
Which his worshippers drank at the break of day,
To shrive their souls ere they joined in the fray.
Still a few drops within it lay;
And round the sacred table glow
Twelve lofty lamps, in splendid row,
From the purest metal cast;
A spoil—the richest, and the last.

XXXIII.

So near they came, the nearest stretched
To grasp the spoil he almost reached,
When old Minotti's hand
Touched with the torch the train—
'Tis fired!

Spire, vaults, the shrine, the spoil, the slain,
The turbaned victors, the Christian band,
All that of living or dead remain,
Hurled on high with the shivered fane,
In one wild roar expired!
The shattered town—the walls thrown down—
The waves a moment backward bent—
The hills that shake, although unrent,
As if an earthquake passed—
The thousand shapeless things all driven
In cloud and flame athwart the heaven,
By that tremendous blast—
Proclaimed the desperate conflict o'er
On that too long afflicted shore:
Up to the sky like rockets go
All that mingled there below:
Many a tall and goodly man,
Scorched and shrivelled to a span,
When he fell to earth again
Like a cinder strewed the plain:
Down the ashes shower like rain;
Some fell in the gulf, which received the sprinkles
With a thousand circling wrinkles;

Some fell on the shore, but, far away,
Scattered o'er the isthmus lay;
Christian or Moslem, which be they?
Let their mothers see and say!
When in cradled rest they lay,
And each nursing mother smiled
On the sweet sleep of her child,
Little deemed she such a day
Would rend those tender limbs away.
Not the matrons that them bore
Could discern their offspring more;
That one moment left no trace
More of human form or face
Save a scattered scalp or bone:
And down came blazing rafters, strown
Around, and many a falling stone,
Deeply dinted in the clay,
All blackened there and reeking lay.
All the living things that heard
That deadly earth shock disappeared:
The wild birds flew; the wild dogs fled,
And howling left the unburied dead;
The camels from their keepers broke;
The distant steer forsook the yoke—

The nearer steed plunged o'er the plain,
And burst his girth, and tore his rein;
The bull-frog's note, from out the marsh,
Deep-mouthed arose, and doubly harsh;
The wolves yelled on the caverned hill,
Where echo rolled in thunder still;
The jackal's troop, in gathered cry,[10]
Bayed from afar complainingly,
With a mixed and mournful sound,
Like crying babe, and beaten hound:
With sudden wing, and ruffled breast,
The eagle left his rocky nest,
And mounted nearer to the sun,
The clouds beneath him seemed so dun;
Their smoke assailed his startled beak,
And made him higher soar and shriek—
Thus was Corinth lost and won!

NOTES.

Note 1, page 9, line 3.

The Turcoman hath left his herd.

The life of the Turcomans is wandering and patriarchal: they dwell in tents.

Note 2, page 11, line 17.

Coumourgi—he whose closing scene.

Ali Coumourgi, the favourite of three sultans, and Grand Vizier to Achmet III. after recovering Peloponnesus from the Venetians in one campaign, was mortally wounded in the next, against the Germans, at the battle of Peterwaradin, (in the plain of Carlowitz) in Hungary, endeavouring to rally his guards. He died of his wounds next day. His last order was the decapitation of General Breuner, and some other German prisoners; and his last words, "Oh that I could thus serve all the Christian dogs!" a speech and act not unlike one of Caligula. He was a young man of great ambition and unbounded presumption: on being told that Prince Eugene, then opposed to him, "was a great general," he said, "I shall become a greater, and at his expense."

Note 3, page 24, line 15.

There shrinks no ebb in that tideless sea.

The reader need hardly be reminded that there are no perceptible tides in the Mediterranean.

Note 4, page 26, line 5.

And their white tusks crunched o'er the whiter skull.

This spectacle I have seen, such as described, beneath the wall of the Seraglio at Constantinople, in the little cavities worn by the Bosphorus in the rock, a narrow terrace of which projects between the wall and the water. I think the fact is also mentioned in Hobhouse's Travels. The bodies were probably those of some refractory Janizaries.

Note 5, page 26, line 14.

And each scalp had a single long tuft of hair.

This tuft, or long lock, is left from a superstition that Mahomet will draw them into Paradise by it.

Note 6, page 29, line 3.

I must here acknowledge a close, though unintentional, resemblance in these twelve lines to a passage in an unpublished poem of Mr. Coleridge, called "Christabel." It was not till after these lines were written that I heard that wild and singularly original and beautiful poem recited; and the MS. of that production I never saw till very recently, by the kindness of Mr. Coleridge himself, who, I hope, is convinced that I have not been a wilful plagiarist. The original idea undoubtedly pertains to Mr. Coleridge, whose poem has been composed above fourteen years. Let me conclude by a hope that he will not longer delay the publication of a production, of which I can only add my mite of approbation to the applause of far more competent judges.

Note 7, page 34, line 18.

There is a light cloud by the moon—

I have been told that the idea expressed from lines 597 to

603 has been admired by those whose approbation is valuable. I am glad of it: but it is not original—at least not mine; it may be found much better expressed in pages 182-3-4 of the English version of "Vathek" (I forget the precise page of the French), a work to which I have before referred; and never recur to, or read, without a renewal of gratification.

Note 8, page 36, line 18.

The horsetails are plucked from the ground, and the sword.

The horsetail, fixed upon a lance, a Pasha's standard.

Note 9, page 42, line 7.

And since the day, when in the strait.

In the naval battle at the mouth of the Dardanelles, between the Venetians and the Turks.

Note 10, page 54, line 7.

The jackal's troop, in gathered cry.

I believe I have taken a poetical license to transplant the jackal from Asia. In Greece I never saw nor heard these animals; but among the ruins of Ephesus I have heard them by hundreds. They haunt ruins, and follow armies.

PARISINA.

PARISINA

TO

SCROPE BEARDMORE DAVIES, Esq.

THE FOLLOWING POEM

IS INSCRIBED

BY ONE WHO HAS LONG ADMIRED HIS TALENTS

AND VALUED HIS FRIENDSHIP.

Jan. 22, 1816.

The following poem is grounded on a circumstance mentioned in Gibbon's "Antiquities of the House of Brunswick."—I am aware, that in modern times the delicacy or fastidiousness of the reader may deem such subjects unfit for the purposes of poetry. The Greek dramatists, and some of the best of our old English writers, were of a different opinion: as Alfieri and Schiller have also been, more recently, upon the continent. The following extract will explain the facts on which the story is founded. The name of *Azo* is substituted for Nicholas, as more metrical.

" Under the reign of Nicholas III. Ferrara was polluted
" with a domestic tragedy. By the testimony of an
" attendant, and his own observation, the Marquis of
" Este discovered the incestuous loves of his wife Pa-
" risina, and Hugo his bastard son, a beautiful and
" valiant youth. They were beheaded in the castle by
" the sentence of a father and husband, who published
" his shame, and survived their execution. He was
" unfortunate, if they were guilty; if they were inno-
" cent, he was still more unfortunate: nor is there any
" possible situation in which I can sincerely approve the
" last act of the justice of a parent."—*Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works*, vol. 3d. p. 470, new edition.

PARISINA.

I.

It is the hour when from the boughs
The nightingale's high note is heard;
It is the hour when lovers' vows
Seem sweet in every whisper'd word;
And gentle winds, and waters near,
Make music to the lonely ear.
Each flower the dews have lightly wet,
And in the sky the stars are met,
And on the wave is deeper blue,
And on the leaf a browner hue,
And in the heaven that clear obscure,
So softly dark, and darkly pure,
Which follows the decline of day,
As twilight melts beneath the moon away.[1]

II.

But it is not to list to the waterfall
That Parisina leaves her hall,
And it is not to gaze on the heavenly light
That the lady walks in the shadow of night;
And if she sits in Este's bower,
'Tis not for the sake of its full-blown flower—
She listens—but not for the nightingale—
Though her ear expects as soft a tale.
There glides a step through the foliage thick,
And her cheek grows pale—and her heart beats quick.
There whispers a voice through the rustling leaves,
And her blush returns, and her bosom heaves:
A moment more—and they shall meet—
'Tis past—her lover's at her feet.

III.

And what unto them is the world beside
With all its change of time and tide?
Its living things—its earth and sky—
Are nothing to their mind and eye.
And heedless as the dead are they
Of aught around, above, beneath;

As if all else had passed away,
They only for each other breathe;
Their very sighs are full of joy
So deep, that did it not decay,
That happy madness would destroy
The hearts which feel its fiery sway:
Of guilt, of peril, do they deem
In that tumultuous tender dream?
Who that have felt that passion's power,
Or paused, or feared in such an hour?
Or thought how brief such moments last:
But yet—they are already past!
Alas! we must awake before
We know such vision comes no more.

IV.

With many a lingering look they leave
The spot of guilty gladness past;
And though they hope, and vow, they grieve,
As if that parting were the last.
The frequent sigh—the long embrace—
The lip that there would cling for ever,
While gleams on Parisina's face
The Heaven she fears will not forgive her,

As if each calmly conscious star
Beheld her frailty from afar—
The frequent sigh, the long embrace,
Yet binds them to their trysting-place.
But it must come, and they must part
In fearful heaviness of heart,
With all the deep and shuddering chill
Which follows fast the deeds of ill.

V.

And Hugo is gone to his lonely bed,
To covet there another's bride;
But she must lay her conscious head
A husband's trusting heart beside.
But fevered in her sleep she seems,
And red her cheek with troubled dreams,
And mutters she in her unrest
A name she dare not breathe by day,
And clasps her Lord unto the breast
Which pants for one away:
And he to that embrace awakes,
And, happy in the thought, mistakes
That dreaming sigh, and warm caress,
For such as he was wont to bless;

And could in very fondness weep
O'er her who loves him even in sleep.

VI.

He clasped her sleeping to his heart,
And listened to each broken word:
He hears—Why doth Prince Azo start,
As if the Archangel's voice he heard?
And well he may—a deeper doom
Could scarcely thunder o'er his tomb,
When he shall wake to sleep no more,
And stand the eternal throne before.
And well he may—his earthly peace
Upon that sound is doomed to cease.
That sleeping whisper of a name
Bespeaks her guilt and Azo's shame.
And whose that name? that o'er his pillow
Sounds fearful as the breaking billow,
Which rolls the plank upon the shore,
And dashes on the pointed rock
The wretch who sinks to rise no more,—
So came upon his soul the shock.
And whose that name? 'tis Hugo's,—his—
In sooth he had not deemed of this!—

'Tis Hugo's,—he, the child of one
He loved—his own all-evil son—
The offspring of his wayward youth,
When he betrayed Bianca's truth,
The maid whose folly could confide
In him who made her not his bride.

VII.

He plucked his poignard in its sheath,
But sheathed it ere the point was bare—
Howe'er unworthy now to breathe,
He could not slay a thing so fair—
At least, not smiling--sleeping—there—
Nay, more:—he did not wake her then,
But gazed upon her with a glance
Which, had she roused her from her trance,
Had frozen her sense to sleep again—
And o'er his brow the burning lamp
Gleamed on the dew-drops big and damp.
She spake no more—but still she slumbered—
While, in his thought, her days are numbered.

VIII.

And with the morn he sought, and found,
In many a tale from those around,
The proof of all he feared to know,
Their present guilt, his future woe;
The long-conniving damsels seek
To save themselves, and would transfer
The guilt—the shame—the doom—to her:
Concealment is no more—they speak
All circumstance which may compel
Full credence to the tale they tell:
And Azo's tortured heart and ear
Have nothing more to feel or hear.

IX.

He was not one who brooked delay:
Within the chamber of his state,
The chief of Este's ancient sway
Upon his throne of judgment sate;
His nobles and his guards are there,—
Before him is the sinful pair;
Both young,—and *one* how passing fair!

With swordless belt, and fettered hand,
Oh, Christ! that thus a son should stand
Before a father's face!
Yet thus must Hugo meet his sire,
And hear the sentence of his ire,
The tale of his disgrace!
And yet he seems not overcome,
Although, as yet, his voice be dumb.

X.

And still, and pale, and silently
Did Parisina wait her doom;
How changed since last her speaking eye
Glanced gladness round the glittering room,
Where high-born men were proud to wait—
Where Beauty watched to imitate
Her gentle voice—her lovely mien—
And gather from her air and gait
The graces of it's queen:
Then,—had her eye in sorrow wept,
A thousand warriors forth had leapt,
A thousand swords had sheathless shone,
And made her quarrel all their own.

Now,—what is she? and what are they?
Can she command, or these obey?
All silent and unheeding now,
With downcast eyes and knitting brow,
And folded arms, and freezing air,
And lips that scarce their scorn forbear,
Her knights and dames, her court—is there:
And he, the chosen one, whose lance
Had yet been couched before her glance,
Who—were his arm a moment free—
Had died or gained her liberty;
The minion of his father's bride,—
He, too, is fettered by her side;
Nor sees her swoln and full eye swim
Less for her own despair than him:
Those lids o'er which the violet vein—
Wandering, leaves a tender stain,
Shining through the smoothest white
That e'er did softest kiss invite—
Now seemed with hot and livid glow
To press, not shade, the orbs below;
Which glance so heavily, and fill,
As tear on tear grows gathering still.

XI.

And he for her had also wept,
But for the eyes that on him gazed:
His sorrow, if he felt it, slept;
Stern and erect his brow was raised.
Whate'er the grief his soul avowed,
He would not shrink before the crowd;
But yet he dared not look on her:
Remembrance of the hours that were—
His guilt—his love—his present state—
His father's wrath—all good men's hate—
His earthly, his eternal fate—
And hers,—oh, hers!—he dared not throw
One look upon that deathlike brow!
Else had his rising heart betrayed
Remorse for all the wreck it made.

XII.

And Azo spake:—"But yesterday
"I gloried in a wife and son;
"That dream this morning passed away;
"Ere day declines, I shall have none.

" My life must linger on alone ;
" Well,—let that pass,—there breathes not one
" Who would not do as I have done:
" Those ties are broken—not by me;
" Let that too pass;—the doom's prepared!
" Hugo, the priest awaits on thee,
" And then—thy crime's reward!
" Away! address thy prayers to Heaven,
" Before its evening stars are met—
" Learn if thou there canst be forgiven;
" It's mercy may absolve thee yet.
" But here, upon the earth beneath,
" There is no spot where thou and I
" Together, for an hour, could breathe:
" Farewell! I will not see thee die—
" But thou, frail thing! shalt view his head—
" Away! I cannot speak the rest:
" Go! woman of the wanton breast;
" Not I, but thou his blood dost shed:
" Go! if that sight thou canst outlive,
" And joy thee in the life I give."

XIII.

And here stern Azo hid his face—
For on his brow the swelling vein
Throbbed as if back upon his brain
The hot blood ebbed and flowed again;
And therefore bowed he for a space,
And passed his shaking hand along
His eye, to veil it from the throng;
While Hugo raised his chained hands,
And for a brief delay demands
His father's ear: the silent sire
Forbids not what his words require.

"It is not that I dread the death—
"For thou hast seen me by thy side
"All redly through the battle ride,
"And that not once a useless brand
"Thy slaves have wrested from my hand,
"Hath shed more blood in cause of thine,
"Than e'er can stain the axe of mine:
"Thou gav'st, and may'st resume my breath,
"A gift for which I thank thee not;
"Nor are my mother's wrongs forgot,

" Her slighted love and ruined name,
" Her offspring's heritage of shame;
" But she is in the grave, where he,
" Her son, thy rival, soon shall be.
" Her broken heart—my severed head—
" Shall witness for thee from the dead
" How trusty and how tender were
" Thy youthful love—paternal care.
" 'Tis true, that I have done thee wrong—
" But wrong for wrong—this deemed thy bride,
" The other victim of thy pride,
" Thou know'st for me was destined long.
" Thou saw'st, and coveted'st her charms—
" And with thy very crime—my birth,
" Thou taunted'st me—as little worth;
" A match ignoble for her arms,
" Because, forsooth, I could not claim
" The lawful heirship of thy name,
" Nor sit on Este's lineal throne:
" Yet, were a few short summers mine,
" My name should more than Este's shine
" With honours all my own.
" I had a sword—and have a breast
" That should have won as haught[2] a crest

" As ever waved along the line
" Of all these sovereign sires of thine.
" Not always knightly spurs are worn
" The brightest by the better born;
" And mine have lanced my courser's flank
" Before proud chiefs of princely rank,
" When charging to the cheering cry
" Of ' Este and of Victory!'"

" I will not plead the cause of crime,
" Nor sue thee to redeem from time
" A few brief hours or days that must
" At length roll o'er my reckless dust;—
" Such maddening moments as my past,
" They could not, and they did not, last—
" Albeit, my birth and name be base,
" And thy nobility of race
" Disdained to deck a thing like me—
" Yet in my lineaments they trace
" Some features of my father's face,
" And in my spirit—all of thee.
" From thee—this tamelessness of heart—
" From thee—nay, wherefore dost thou start?—

" From thee in all their vigour came
" My arm of strength, my soul of flame—
" Thou didst not give me life alone,
" But all that made me more thine own.
" See what thy guilty love hath done!
" Repaid thee with too like a son!
" I am no bastard in my soul,
" For that, like thine, abhorred controul:
" And for my breath, that hasty boon
" Thou gav'st and wilt resume so soon,
" I valued it no more than thou,
" When rose thy casque above thy brow,
" And we, all side by side, have striven,
" And o'er the dead our coursers driven:
" The past is nothing—and at last
" The future can but be the past;
" Yet would I that I then had died:
" For though thou work'dst my mother's ill,
" And made thy own my destined bride,
" I feel thou art my father still;
" And, harsh as sounds thy hard decree,
" 'Tis not unjust, although from thee.
" Begot in sin, to die in shame,
" My life begun and ends the same:

" As erred the sire, so erred the son-
" And thou must punish both in one.
" My crime seems worst to human view,
" But God must judge between us too!"

XIV.

He ceased—and stood with folded arms,
On which the circling fetters sounded;
And not an ear but felt as wounded,
Of all the chiefs that there were ranked,
When those dull chains in meeting clanked:
Till Parisina's fatal charms
Again attracted every eye—
Would she thus hear him doomed to die!
She stood, I said, all pale and still,
The living cause of Hugo's ill:
Her eyes unmoved, but full and wide,
Not once had turned to either side—
Nor once did those sweet eyelids close,
Or shade the glance o'er which they rose,
But round their orbs of deepest blue
The circling white dilated grew—
And there with glassy gaze she stood
As ice were in her curdled blood;

But every now and then a tear
So large and slowly gathered slid
From the long dark fringe of that fair lid,
It was a thing to see, not hear!
And those who saw, it did surprise,
Such drops could fall from human eyes.
To speak she thought—the imperfect note
Was choked within her swelling throat,
Yet seemed in that low hollow groan
Her whole heart gushing in the tone.
It ceased—again she thought to speak,
Then burst her voice in one long shriek,
And to the earth she fell like stone
Or statue from its base o'erthrown,
More like a thing that ne'er had life,—
A monument of Azo's wife,—
Than her, that living guilty thing,
Whose every passion was a sting,
Which urged to guilt, but could not bear
That guilt's detection and despair.
But yet she lived—and all too soon
Recovered from that death-like swoon—
But scarce to reason—every sense
Had been o'erstrung by pangs intense;

And each frail fibre of her brain
(As bow-strings, when relaxed by rain,
The erring arrow launch aside)
Sent forth her thoughts all wild and wide—
The past a blank, the future black,
With glimpses of a dreary track,
Like lightning on the desart path,
When midnight storms are mustering wrath.
She feared—she felt that something ill
Lay on her soul, so deep and chill—
That there was sin and shame she knew;
That some one was to die—but who?
She had forgotten:—did she breathe?
Could this be still the earth beneath?
The sky above, and men around;
Or were they fiends who now so frowned
On one, before whose eyes each eye
Till then had smiled in sympathy?
All was confused and undefined,
To her all-jarred and wandering mind;
A chaos of wild hopes and fears:
And now in laughter, now in tears,
But madly still in each extreme,
She strove with that convulsive dream;

For so it seemed on her to break:
Oh! vainly must she strive to wake!

XV.

The Convent bells are ringing,
But mournfully and slow;
In the grey square turret swinging,
With a deep sound, to and fro.
Heavily to the heart they go!
Hark! the hymn is singing—
The song for the dead below,
Or the living who shortly shall be so!
For a departing being's soul
The death-hymn peals and the hollow bells knoll:
He is near his mortal goal;
Kneeling at the Friar's knee;
Sad to hear—and piteous to see—
Kneeling on the bare cold ground,
With the block before and the guards around—
And the headsman with his bare arm ready,
That the blow may be both swift and steady,
Feels if the axe be sharp and true—
Since he set its edge anew:
While the crowd in a speechless circle gather
To see the Son fall by the doom of the Father.

XVI.

It is a lovely hour as yet
Before the summer sun shall set,
Which rose upon that heavy day,
And mocked it with his steadiest ray;
And his evening beams are shed
Full on Hugo's fated head,
As his last confession pouring
To the monk, his doom deploring
In penitential holiness,
He bends to hear his accents bless
With absolution such as may
Wipe our mortal stains away.
That high sun on his head did glisten
As he there did bow and listen—
And the rings of chesnut hair
Curled half down his neck so bare;
But brighter still the beam was thrown
Upon the axe which near him shone
With a clear and ghastly glitter——
Oh! that parting hour was bitter!
Even the stern stood chilled with awe:
Dark the crime, and just the law—
Yet they shuddered as they saw.

XVII.

The parting prayers are said and over
Of that false son—and daring lover!
His beads and sins are all recounted,
His hours to their last minute mounted—
His mantling cloak before was stripped,
His bright brown locks must now be clipped,
'Tis done—all closely are they shorn—
The vest which till this moment worn—
The scarf which Parisina gave—
Must not adorn him to the grave.
Even that must now be thrown aside,
And o'er his eyes the kerchief tied;
But no—that last indignity
Shall ne'er approach his haughty eye.
All feelings seemingly subdued,
In deep disdain were half renewed,
When headman's hands prepared to bind
Those eyes which would not brook such blind:
As if they dared not look on death.
"No—yours my forfeit blood and breath—
"These hands are chained—but let me die
"At least with an unshackled eye—

"Strike:"—and as the word he said,
Upon the block he bowed his head;
These the last accents Hugo spoke:
"Strike"—and flashing fell the stroke—
Rolled the head—and, gushing, sunk
Back the stained and heaving trunk,
In the dust, which each deep vein
Slaked with its ensanguined rain;
His eyes and lips a moment quiver,
Convulsed and quick—then fix for ever.

He died, as erring man should die,
Without display, without parade;
Meekly had he bowed and prayed,
As not disdaining priestly aid,
Nor desperate of all hope on high.
And while before the Prior kneeling,
His heart was weaned from earthly feeling;
His wrathful sire—his paramour—
What were they in such an hour?
No more reproach—no more despair;
No thought but heaven—no word but prayer—
Save the few which from him broke,
When, bared to meet the headman's stroke,

He claimed to die with eyes unbound,
His sole adieu to those around.

XVIII.

Still as the lips that closed in death,
Each gazer's bosom held his breath:
But yet, afar, from man to man,
A cold electric shiver ran,
As down the deadly blow descended
On him whose life and love thus ended;
And with a hushing sound comprest,
A sigh shrunk back on every breast;
But no more thrilling noise rose there,
Beyond the blow that to the block
Pierced through with forced and sullen shock,
Save one:—what cleaves the silent air
So madly shrill—so passing wild?
That, as a mother's o'er her child,
Done to death by sudden blow,
To the sky these accents go,
Like a soul's in endless woe.
Through Azo's palace-lattice driven,
That horrid voice ascends to heaven,

And every eye is turned thereon;
But sound and sight alike are gone!
It was a woman's shriek—and ne'er
In madlier accents rose despair;
And those who heard it, as it past,
In mercy wished it were the last.

XIX.

Hugo is fallen; and, from that hour,
No more in palace, hall, or bower,
Was Parisina heard or seen:
Her name—as if she ne'er had been—
Was banished from each lip and ear,
Like words of wantonness or fear;
And from Prince Azo's voice, by none
Was mention heard of wife or son;
No tomb—no memory had they;
Theirs was unconsecrated clay;
At least the knight's who died that day.
But Parisina's fate lies hid
Like dust beneath the coffin lid:
Whether in convent she abode,
And won to heaven her dreary road,

By blighted and remorseful years
Of scourge, and fast, and sleepless tears;
Or if she fell by bowl or steel,
For that dark love she dared to feel;
Or if, upon the moment smote,
She died by tortures less remote;
Like him she saw upon the block,
With heart that shared the headman's shock,
In quickened brokenness that came,
In pity, o'er her shattered frame,
None knew—and none can ever know:
But whatsoe'er its end below,
Her life began and closed in woe!

XX.

And Azo found another bride,
And goodly sons grew by his side;
But none so lovely and so brave
As him who withered in the grave;
Or if they were—on his cold eye
Their growth but glanced unheeded by,
Or noticed with a smothered sigh.
But never tear his cheek descended,
And never smile his brow unbended;

And o'er that fair broad brow were wrought
The intersected lines of thought;
Those furrows which the burning share
Of Sorrow ploughs untimely there;
Scars of the lacerating mind
Which the Soul's war doth leave behind.
He was past all mirth or woe:
Nothing more remained below,
But sleepless nights and heavy days,
A mind all dead to scorn or praise,
A heart which shunned itself—and yet
That would not yield—nor could forget,
Which when it least appeared to melt,
Intently thought—intensely felt:
The deepest ice which ever froze
Can only o'er the surface close—
The living stream lies quick below,
And flows—and cannot cease to flow.
Still was his sealed-up bosom haunted
By thoughts which Nature hath implanted;
Too deeply rooted thence to vanish,
Howe'er our stifled tears we banish;
When, struggling as they rise to start,
We check those waters of the heart,

They are not dried—those tears unshed
But flow back to the fountain head,
And resting in their spring more pure,
For ever in its depth endure,
Unseen, unwept, but uncongealed,
And cherished most where least revealed.
With inward starts of feeling left,
To throb o'er those of life bereft;
Without the power to fill again
The desart gap which made his pain;
Without the hope to meet them where
United souls shall gladness share,
With all the consciousness that he
Had only passed a just decree;
That they had wrought their doom of ill,
Yet Azo's age was wretched still.
The tainted branches of the tree,
If lopped with care, a strength may give,
By which the rest shall bloom and live
All greenly fresh and wildly free.
But if the lightning, in its wrath,
The waving boughs with fury scathe,
The massy trunk the ruin feels,
And never more a leaf reveals.

NOTES.

Note 1, page 63, line 14.

As twilight melts beneath the moon away.

The lines contained in Section I. were printed as set to music some time since: but belonged to the poem where they now appear, the greater part of which was composed prior to "Lara" and other compositions since published.

Note 2, page 75, last line.

That should have won as haught a crest.

Haught—haughty—"Away *haught* man, thou art insulting me."

Shakspeare, Richard II.

THE END.

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Byron, George Gordon Byron

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